African Americans, the Democratic Party and Barack Obama:

A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

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The following is a qualitative study that explores the voting behavior and political attitudes of 12 African-American through in-depth analysis one-on-one interviews that revolve around two questions (1) Why do so many African-Americans support the Democratic Party? (2) Why did so many African-Americans vote for Barack Obama?

After a thematic analysis was conducted to find recurring and repetitive themes, the findings reveal that respondents held overwhelmingly negative views of the Republican Party and former president George W. Bush. This negativity stemmed from a disconnection between the Republicans and Bush’s general platforms on the war and the economy and the respondents views of these issues. It was also found that they held more positive views of the Democratic Party and its historical legacy with African-Americans. Finally, it was found that the subjects felt that Barack Obama represented progress as far as race relations and that he would be a good president. However, they did not feel that he represented a post-racial society, or that his election would amend United States race relations.

Approved: ______________________________________________________

Robert Shelly

Professor of Sociology
To the late Desmond Buford
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study examines the voting behavior of African-Americans and the attitudes that shape these actions. African-Americans have been the most loyal voting bloc of any kind when it comes to the Democratic Party for the past half century. Yet, little attention has been given to the nuanced perceptions and attitudes of individuals within the African-American voting community. The idea that the African-American vote will automatically favor Democrats can lead to misconceptions about why they prefer the Democratic Party, and can mislead the general public. If the public is misled about these preferences, the political issues that affect African-Americans may be overlooked and undermine the government’s ability to represent this community. This study will address African-American voting behaviors by exploring this loyalty through these voters’ perspectives.

In addition to understanding why African-Americans so heavily prefer Democrats, this study also explores the effect that Barack Obama had on these attitudes. Only time will tell what long-term impact the election of President Obama will have on the African-American community and the country, but many questions have arisen as the initial euphoria has subsided. It is now necessary to investigate why so many African-Americans voted for President Obama. This is the first time a non-white person has been elected to this country’s highest office, and some sources suggest that this country is headed toward acceptance of greater diversity in relation to elected officials. If these predictions come true, it is safe to assume that we may be presented with more non-white candidates in the future. This study contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating
potential strategies for exploring how racial and ethnic groups perceive presidential candidates of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds.

A substantial, though not extensive, amount of research has explored contemporary black/African-American voting and political behavior. Much of the quantitative research on this subject comes to the general conclusion that African-Americans overwhelmingly support Democratic candidates in Presidential elections. To the best of my knowledge, the current study is unique among this literature because of its use of qualitative methods, or more specifically, in-depth, one-on-one interviews. Also, the political climate surrounding this study is unique as well. The first African-American President is currently in office, and this is the first chance the United States has had to discuss the voting behavior of African-Americans while one of their own is in charge of the country. This study focuses especially on how African-American voters functioned within our modern political landscape in the context of the 2008 Election.

This study examines two broad research questions: (1) why do African-Americans prefer Democratic presidential candidates so strongly? (2) Why did so many African-Americans vote for Barack Obama? The following chapter will incorporate both theories of African-American political thought and the more general theories of American political behavior, followed by chapters on the methods used to explore these questions, the findings that arose from the and a discussion of these findings.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following section is divided into three parts focusing on the different aspects of voting behavior that have provided the foundations for this study. The first part will discuss the theories used to explain voting behavior from the categories discussed by Lau and Redlawsk (2006). The second part will discuss the literature on black/African-American voting behavior. The final part of this section will briefly discuss the literature on the 2008 election of Barack Obama.

Rational-Economic Voting

Voting, though straightforward in terms of survey data and exit polls, is actually a very complex, nuanced process. This complexity is manifested in the wide array of theories that are used to explain voting behavior (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006), and the multitude of sociodemographic variables that influence voting choice and political thought on multiple levels (Teixeira, 2008). Many explanations organize themselves around socioeconomic status.

Economic class is one of the most pervasive factors in the United States and affects virtually every aspect of American culture. For this reason, American economic issues are often politicized by political parties and the candidates they produce, presumably because voters see the economy as an important issue, if not the most important issue in most elections (CNN.com, 2008; Abcnews.go.com, 2008; Frey, 2008). Depending on the economic conditions of any given election, political parties and candidates attempt to convey certain messages about how they intend to manage the economy. The campaign strategies candidates employ will affect how they are viewed by
voters, and whether or not they receive support on Election Day (Dorussen and Taylor, 2002).

Individually-focused, “rational” economic explanations of voting behavior have stated that people dispassionately weigh the positive and negative aspects of the candidates at hand, and make the choice that best serves their economic interest (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006; von Newman and Morgenstern, 1947; Arrow, 1963). Overall, rational-economic voting theories suggest that voters have the ability to respond to economic conditions through their vote. For example, in times of economic downturn, incumbent parties tend to suffer at the polls, suggesting that voters are prone to respond to downturns in the economy by voting against the party that oversaw the downturn (Kramer, 1971; Sears, Lau, Tyler & Allen, Jr., 1980; Ebeid and Rodden, 2006).

Lewis-Beck (1988) showed that voters take into account the personal and collective implications of economic conditions, as well as the short- and long-term ramifications. In Lewis-Beck’s study, the collective implications are defined as those of the national economy as a whole. The short/long-term ramifications are defined as those of the past 12 months, the next 12 months and the next 5 years. This research suggests that when voters evaluate their economic circumstances, they have the potential to take more than their personal economic status into account, and also consider the long-term economic implications of their vote. Sears, Lau, Tyler & Allen, Jr. (1980) also show that voters respond to the economic conditions they believe have been created by incumbent parties and future expectations of the economy. Overall, this research implies that voters have the potential to process a wide range of economic information pragmatically in
relation to how they vote. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that people will vote in what they believe is their own economic self-interest, as it would be counterproductive for voters to actively choose candidates that they believe will directly hurt their economic status. When applied to the current research, one would assume through this theory that African-Americans will vote for parties and candidates that they believe will address their economic self-interest. It is possible that this self-interest could be viewed by African-Americans as their personal economic status or that of the African-American community as a collective.

Though this research is insightful, rational-economic theories of voting are not without their limitations. As Blau (1997) explains, most criticisms of rational choice theory revolve around the notion that it neglects “emotional, pathological and moral” influences on behavior (pp. 16). There has been a substantial amount of research that suggests “irrational” political behavior is common (Lanning, 2005; Bartels, 1996; Nadeau, Niemi and Amato, 1995, Frank, 2004), especially when it comes to less informed voters (e.g., Kam, 2005). Blau (1997) also states that rational choice theories are inadequate in explaining the societal conditions that influence the life chances of individuals. Social structures can severely limit exposure to certain ideas and information. For example, opportunities to engage in extended political thought and discourse can be severely limited by lack of education, and educational opportunities can be affected by one’s income. Thus, economic and educational deprivation have the potential to limit the amount of political information available to different categories of people, and can also limit the awareness people may have of resources that can offset
these limitations. Rational-economic voter theories cannot account for the vast
differences in resources that influence the ideas that individuals are exposed to as they
calculate which candidate will best address their economic conditions. Furthermore, the
“emotional, pathological and moral” (Blau, 1997) influences on voters cannot be
accounted for when a theory assumes that voters are influenced solely by economic
interest. Frank (2004) demonstrates this through an in-depth look at Kansas voters, whom
the author feels vote directly against their rational-economic interests.

“Good wages, fair play in farm country, the fate of the small town, even the one
we live in all these are a distant second to evolution, which we will strike from
the books, and public education, which we will undermine in a hundred inventive
ways” (p. 68).

This statement suggest that, though politicians may undermine the economic stability of
voters, other issues can come into play that may not have a direct effect on the economic
standing of voters.

However, political issues are not the only factors that can affect how voters
decide. It should also be noted that human cognition has several limitations that can
inhibit voters’ ability to be fully rational on Election Day. Miller (1956) explains that
individuals can only process a limited amount of information actively, while our senses
are constantly being stimulated by a wide variety of sensations. In today’s information
age, it is impossible for us to always be aware of all the information we come in contact
with, and the messages our cognitive systems receive. So, our long-term memories
receive only a fraction of the information that we have received through our senses. This
is important when it comes to voting, as even the most well-read voters will only be able to work with a limited amount of cognitive information. Speaking of the well-informed, Taber and Lodge (2000) and Lau and Redlawsk (2006) have noted that voters who are highly informed tend to also be highly partisan, meaning they will be more likely to engage in motivated reasoning, where confirming preexisting attitudes about political candidates and issues is the top priority as opposed to more objective reasoning. Fiske and Taylor (1991) also demonstrate that individual voters are highly capable of taking various cognitive shortcuts. These shortcuts are the basis of two other major theories in voting behavior: single-issue voting theories and “bounded rationality” theories.

Single-Issue Voting

Economic explanations encompass a wide array of political issues and are an explicit set of political issues to many voters (Texieira, 2008). However, rational economic theories tend to be limited in scope, and do not take into account political issues that are not explicitly related to economics. For example, economics is not explicitly related to values issues such as abortion or gun control, but these issues and others have been cited by a substantial number of voters as important political issues (Conover, Gray, and Coombs, 1982). Voters have the potential to consider a wide array of issues, and may decide that certain political issues are more important than others. When voters have bestowed this importance on a particular issue or set of issues, they rely heavily on the attitudes they have developed toward that issue when evaluating political candidates (Fournier, Blais, Nadeau, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2003).
Those who endorse single-issue theories (e.g., Conover, Gray, & Coombs, 1982) suggest that voters seek out one issue or a small number of issues of importance, and vote accordingly. For example, a person who sees abortion as the single-most important issue when evaluating candidates will vote for the candidate whose abortion stance fits his or her own. Carmines and Stimson (1980) state that there are two types of issues: “hard issue” voters deliberately calculate the policy implications of a particular issue, while “easy issue” voters respond to the issue in question in a simplistic, instinctive manner.

Easy issues tend to be outcome-oriented, symbolic issues. For example, when abortion is framed as a political issue, the debate tends to center on the legality of abortion. Issues such as these allow voters to determine the positions of candidates on those topics with relative ease (i.e., “pro-life” vs. “pro-choice” candidates). Hard issues require voters to develop a sophisticated understanding of the issue at hand, the stances of the candidates and parties in question, and their own relation to the issue. The economy, for example, requires voters to develop a more specific understanding of how economic systems work. And as opposed to abortion, economic issues are not as easily framed the same way abortion is framed dichotomously as a “pro-choice” vs. “pro-life” issue. Virtually every aspect of the day-to-day lives of the American people can be affected by fluctuations in the economy, while abortion is more limited in the number of people it will directly affect. While a divide may exist in the public eye on economics between liberals and conservatives or Republicans and Democrats, there are multiple issues that can be addressed under an economic umbrella (social programs, military spending, foreign aid, etc.).
Conover et al. (1982) state that most cases of single-issue voting tend to fall into the “easy” category, and that these issues tend to be symbolic in nature. “In effect, single issues are those that are ‘bigger than themselves’ in the sense that they are defined in terms of symbols that evoke extraordinarily strong emotional reactions and substantive meanings so ambiguous that people can read into the issues virtually any meaning that they care to” (p. 311). The authors also state that this voting strategy is, used by both highly informed voters and uninformed ones as well. This is important because it demonstrates how this strategy can be applied to a wider sample of voters, and not just those who are less informed. And as Nadeau, Niemi and Amato (1995) state, issue importance and issue knowledge tend to have a strong relationship. So, when a person deems an issue as important, they will be more likely to have a great deal of knowledge on that topic. They will also be more likely to use this issue to evaluate the candidates in the election at hand.

“Bounded Rationality” Theories

“Bounded rationality” (Simon, 2000; Jones, 1999; Lau & Redlawsk, 2006) or “low information rationality” (Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, 1991) theories suggest that decision makers are rational in the sense that their behavior is generally motivated by some sort of goal. Bounded rationality theory has its foundations in the fact that human cognitive ability has an important number of limitations that can influence the decisions and goals that voters establish (Anderson, 1983). This theory also states that emotional restraints can play a role in the type of reasoning used by individuals making some sort of choice (Guth, 2010). It also states that some human behavior is
merely habitual, rather than the product of calculated, rational action (Guth, 2010). Jones (2001) supports this notion while criticizing rational choice theory, stating that:

“If people were completely rational, they would act on relevant information from the environment and incorporate it into their decisions in a seamless fashion. The human mind, however, will not allow seamless transition of information into decision. Humans do not take action in direct proportion to incoming information. They distort it. This distortion stems from the manner in which the mind operates” (pp. 84).

Jones (2001) notes three different sources of distortion when it comes to human cognition. The first is stated as “Predisposition and habituation” (p. 85), which stems from the notion that human sensory systems alter signals as those signals are received. In fact, some sensory information is never processed by the organs that receive it (Zimmerman, 1989). Thus, humans are especially responsive to certain amounts and intensities of light, sound, etc, and are less responsive or unresponsive to sensory stimulation that falls outside of these ranges of intensity. When applied to voting, this means that voters can hear and see political information that they may not consciously process and incorporate into their voting decision. Jones (2001) states that the same could be applied to social information and that human beings can choose to process some social information more actively than others. So, it is possible that a person in the current study may only process information about the economy while ignoring information on the health care issue, despite being affected by both. If one were to be more receptive to
information about the economy and less about health care, this may influence their voting
decision if one candidate emphasizes the economy over the health care debate.

The second source of distortion comes from the multitude of sources from which
decision makers derive information. As Jones (2001) points out, any given decision
maker can get information from the seemingly infinite number of news and information
sources. However, it is difficult for both scholars and the decision makers themselves to
pinpoint exactly how this information is sorted, and what sources of information deserve
more attention than others. Thus, it is difficult to say how exactly voters might receive
and process the wide array of information available on politically charged topics such as
the economy, health care or abortion, especially with so many sources available on the
Internet. The final source of distortion noted by Jones (2001) is the gap between
“objective indicators” (pp. 85) of sociopolitical problems and the perceptions of those
problems. This means that human beings are not above interpreting some issues as more
severe than they are while viewing other serious issues as less important. For example,
imagine that all reliable statistical evidence suggests that more people are killed each year
by drunk drivers than by terrorist attacks. It is possible that, after sensationalized
reporting on terrorist attacks, voters may see terrorist attacks as more of a threat than they
would drunk drivers, and would be more likely to use their views on terrorism in how
they process information during an election. Even though drunk driving fatalities may be
a more prevalent social problem, the perception that terrorism is a bigger issue has the
potential to distort how people process information about these subjects in relation to
political parties and candidates. As a result, candidates who address terrorism more
thoroughly than drunk driving might receive more votes because the latter is seen as a more important issue than the former.

Bounded rationality, as a whole, seems to be at least partially applicable to the 2008 election. For example, in the past election, there were suggestions that now-President Barack Obama was not a United States citizen (e.g., orlytaitzesq.com, 2009). These ideas seemed to be generally motivated by something other than rational thought, as both claims have been refuted multiple times by credible sources (e.g., Nakaso, 2009). Nonetheless, this did not stop a small group of individuals from believing these ideas about Barack Obama (e.g., orlytaitzesq.com, 2009). These controversies are examples of how rationality can be bounded. The subjects of this example believe that Obama was not born in America. And since non-American citizens are not allowed to be President of the United States, this rumor was in all likelihood created to discredit Obama as a presidential candidate. But this example demonstrates how rationality can be bounded by emotion and motivated reasoning, as opposed to actual facts.

The literature on both bounded rationality theory and single-issue theory is more limited than literature on rational choice theories of voting. These theories fill in gaps that rational economic theories cannot by addressing forms of voting that are not fully based in objective rationality. However, these theories do not always address the social factors and structures in which viewpoints are formed. This is a problem these theories share with rational-economic theories. They may be useful in addressing how individual voters make decisions, but they may not be the best for discussing the large social institutions that affect who votes and how. For example, race is one social factor that has clear effects
on how individuals vote. If a voter has been socialized to believe their race is central to their identity and that certain issues need to be addressed in their racial community, they will be likely to vote for candidates they feel will address these issues most effectively.

“Early Socialization” and Political Attitudes

The aforementioned theories have not directly addressed the sociodemographic variability of the American voting public or the attitudes that could result from this. The final category of general voting behaviors stems from social psychology. Lau and Redlawsk (2006) discuss the idea of “early socialization,” a concept that suggests that voters learn to identify themselves with certain political groups and voting blocs early on through different forms of socialization. These groups and blocs are generally political parties, although issue stances, economic evaluations, and perceptions of incumbent and challenging candidates can play a role as well. This idea suggests that early identifications cause voters to process the information presented to them in a way that is biased toward those predispositions (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006, pp. 8-12). In other words, predispositions that have been learned early in life influence political attitudes. According to this theory, voters who identify as Democrat have learned to identify as such relatively early, and will process information about politics and candidates in ways that will allow them to maintain “cognitive consistency” between these identifications and their attitudes (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006, pp. 8). This could play a part in the current study. If subjects identify with a certain political party, they may be more inclined to agree with that party based on their preexisting affiliation with that party rather than impartially evaluating the issues.
Additional political attitudes have been discussed at length in the literature. Religion, gender, political ideology, and race are just a few variables that can affect political perceptions within the American political landscape. With religion, McDermott (2009, 2007) has demonstrated how voters stereotype candidates based on their faith, and how these ideas help shape their vote. Religion can also affect political engagement (Campbell, 2004), issue perceptions, and election outcomes (Lanning, 2005). Perceptions of gender held by voters play a role in the way candidates are evaluated (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Koch, 2000) and how voters are perceived within the media (Elder and Greene, 2007). Political ideology and partisanship is considered to be, in and of itself, an attitude (Green, 2002) and this strongly influences both political biases (Bartels, 2002) and voter choice (Jacoby, 2009). Racial and ethnic backgrounds have been shown to affect political issue perceptions (Wallace, Abduk-Khaliq, Czuchry and Sia, 2008; Avery, 2000), candidate perceptions (Kidd, Diggs, Farooq and Murray, 2007), and individual and collective political ideologies (Tam, 1995; Kidd, et. al., 2007). While it may not always be clear exactly how political issues are processed by voters on an individual, case-by-case basis, this research does show that racial and ethnic group membership and political thought have some sort of relationship at the group level. The question, of course, is how these thoughts are affected by social identifiers such as race, gender, or religious affiliation. Part of the reason is that each of these characteristics can involve “early socialization,” as these labels and their cultural implications can be learned as early as childhood. Each characteristic seems to have a very real impact on political
perceptions and voting behaviors within these populations, as well as how members of
different religious, gender or racial/ethnic groups are viewed as candidates.

Attitudes and perceptions often stem from these early-learned social
identifications and demographic groupings. Some theorists (e.g., Lewis-Beck et. al, 2008)
believe that these identifications and demographic factors are more important than party
identification. For example, the socioeconomic class of a given voter may drive party
identification, which in turn, may influence political attitudes and have a substantial
impact on how candidates and parties are evaluated.

One potential problem with evaluating attitudes, perceptions, and their influences
on voter choice or general political behavior is that bias can be explicit and implicit. For
instance, Payne, Krosnick, Pasek Lelkes, Akhtar and Tompson (2010) stated that both
explicit and implicit prejudice toward racial minorities influence how people evaluate
minority candidates. Payne, et. al. (2010) found that in the most recent presidential
elections, those with higher levels of explicit racial prejudice were more likely to vote for
John McCain and less likely to vote for Barack Obama. Also, voters high in levels of
implicit racial prejudice were less likely to vote for Obama, more likely to choose a third-
party candidate or refrain from voting completely (Payne, et. al., 2010). Greenwald,
Smith, Sriram, Bar-Anan and Nosek (2009) found that implicit prejudice was actually a
greater predictor of behaviors and judgments than explicit prejudice. This is important, as
it implies that beliefs can be influenced by factors that the subjects are not fully conscious
of as they make decisions.
This literature shows that factors such as race and ethnicity, gender or religion can affect both how voters within these respective groups view issues and candidates and how minority candidates are perceived as members of these groups. This literature also seems to expand voting beyond the individual psychological level and begins to explore the social aspects of voting beyond individual cognition or individual issue perceptions. “Early socialization” theory can serve as the foundation for the exploration of the sociopolitical behavior of large groups of people beyond micro-level analysis. The literature explored here suggests that long-standing social identifications such as race can influence voting on multiple levels. It also addresses more specific factors and biases that can influence voting behavior, while the other three categories discussed here do not directly account for the influence of sociodemographic categories on voting behavior.

Election results and studies (McDermott 2007, 2009; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Koch, 2000; Wallace, Abduk-Khaliq, Czuchry and Sia, 2008; Avery, 2000) of these results would suggest that social identifiers such as religion, gender, or race play a significant role in political behavior. This is manifested in many ways, and voting poll data is just one way political behavior can be studied. These studies also suggest that the perceptions often tied to these groups of people affect how candidates are perceived as members of different sociodemographic categories. The socialization of these groups in relation to one another always has the potential to influence political attitudes and behaviors, and this is the basis of “early socialization” theories. The next section of this study will do just that by taking a specific sociodemographic category of people (African-
African-Americans) and analyzing the foundations of their historical political behavior and ideologies through their general voting behavior.

_African-American Voting-Historical Context_

History is of great importance when it comes to African-American voting. Many African-Americans were enslaved for centuries leading up to the Civil War and the Reconstruction Period, when they saw a dramatic increase in voting rights at the federal level (Valelly, 2004). This freedom to vote was short-lived, as they remained largely disenfranchised throughout this country’s history until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Valelly, 2004). The legacy of exclusion perpetrated by America toward the African-American community is highly visible in many accounts of American and African-American history (Valelley, 2004; Malone, 2008). But how does this legacy affect the political and voting behaviors of African-Americans today, if at all? How do African-Americans fit into the larger context of American politics and why have African-Americans found themselves preferring the Democratic Party (Teixeira, 2008; Todd and Gawiser, 2009) despite the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, being a Republican President?

According to Topping (2008), the alienation of African-Americans from the Republican Party has its roots in the Reconstruction Period. Even though Emancipation was primarily a Republican legislative maneuver, the party was not enthusiastic about helping African-Americans obtain rights outside freedom from slavery. In spite of this, African-Americans largely remained loyal to Republicans until around the presidency of Herbert Hoover. At this point in history, the Republican Party began to turn to a
“Southern Strategy.” This approach entailed a disregard for the African-American voting population in favor of winning the votes of white Southerners, whose vote was believed to hold more weight at the time. While this strategy was successful in getting the Republicans into office in 1928, it antagonized many black voters (Topping, 2008). This neglect of African-American concerns by Republicans throughout the period between the Civil War and the Great Depression angered the African-American voting bloc, and by 1936, African-Americans had virtually deserted the Republican Party (Topping, 2008). 1936 did not mark the end of racial discrimination in America’s political arenas, however. Despite the creation and expansion of social welfare programs in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, racial discrimination persisted in many forms. For example, Bunche (1936) and Myrdal (1944) both noted the impacts that the New Deal would have on African-Americans and that these impacts were often negative. Valelly (2004) had noted the mixed legacy of New Deal programs in relation to African-Americans. The author here notes how public housing programs, for example, often “perpetuated racial stigma and isolation” (pp. 154) while becoming more “racially inclusive” in relation to “access to decision makers, symbolism, electoral mobilization and group benefits” (pp. 156).

These historical influences relate to the current study in that they reflect how mass political behavior is not usually the result of one event, but a series of ongoing changes and events. As far as African-Americans, perhaps partisan loyalty is not purely a matter of racial allegiance, but one guided by attitudes and perspectives in relation to substantive political issues (Valelly 2004; Wallace, et. al., 2008; Kidd, et. al., 2007).
History demonstrates that African-American political alignment does not appear to be based solely on some sense of group or party loyalty (Topping, 2008; Malone, 2008), but on the same issues that other Americans find important such as the economy or foreign policy.

As Dawson (2001) has noted:

“[S]ocieties which are marked by racial apartheid are not only likely to develop separate public spheres, but those spheres themselves become the bases for the articulation of divergent, often conflicting, group interests. The subordinate group, in particular, is likely in bourgeois democratic societies to perceive ideology through the lens of whatever social cleavage is the basis of its historical oppression, whether its members believe their oppression is to be based on religion, class, or (in the American case) race” (p. 52).

Ideologies and attitudes can arise from both dominant groups and oppositional forces. African-Americans have not simply adopted every stance and opinion of the dominant class. African-American politics are not purely oppositional, and will be affected by the general political context of the time. The economic climate, for example, has the potential to affect the way people express themselves in voting booth. African-American political thought is generally rooted “in the social practices, movements and institutions of the day” (Dawson, 2001, p. 58). Accordingly, this study will focus on the political attitudes of African-Americans within today’s political institutions and how race might affect their perceptions of these institutions.
Theories of African-American Politics

Dawson (2001) and Harris-Lacewell (2004) have covered African-American political theories in detail. While the current study does not use an explicitly racial political theory, it is still important to discuss these theories as potential explanations of the voting behavior of African-Americans. Harris-Lacewell (2004) believes that four different ideologies are used by African-Americans to frame their political interaction with the rest of American society. These theories are Black Nationalism, Liberal Integrationism, Black Feminism and Black Conservativism. Each theory is rooted in the idea of what Harris-Lacewell (2004) calls Black common sense, or “the idea among African-Americans that blackness is a meaningful political category” (pp. 23). This idea functions under the assumption that African-Americans see their “blackness” as identifiable, constant over time, and significant to both personal life and political decisions (pp. 23). It also entails the idea of shared racial experiences among African-Americans.

Black Nationalism points to the historical discrimination black people have faced, and states that Black separation from these oppressive structures is necessary in order to achieve political, social, cultural and economic goals (Harris-Lacewell, 2004). This theory, or at least its 20th century form, has roots in Garveyism. Named after Marcus Garvey, this idea is rooted in the assumption that worldwide Black subjugation necessitates the independence of Blacks from other groups of people (Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Martin, 1983). Black Nationalists would imply, in many instances, that African-

1 In this section, please note that the phrases “Black” and “African-American” are used interchangeably.
Americans cannot achieve cultural, social economic and political goals in existing political, economic, and social institutions.

Liberal integrationists believe that cross-racial alliances and institutions are not only feasible but necessary to black achievement. This theory has its foundations in the more general forms of liberalism despite the racial bias (Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Dawson, 2001) and variations in attitudes toward integration within American society (e.g., Wirth, 1981). Integrationists generally believe in a society where African-Americans have the same rights and privileges that other citizens enjoy, and that the interests of African-Americans are closely linked to the interests of America in general. Liberal integrationists tend to believe in a strong central government that has the power to intervene where racial inequality pervades.

Contemporary Black conservatism, with roots in American conservatism, cites “behavioral” and “attitudinal” problems within the African-American community as the main source of racial inequality (Harris-Lacewell, 2004). This perspective maintains that a strong, intrusive central government inhibits social progress among African-Americans and that large-scale racial inequality has already been addressed by American society. Black conservatives generally maintain that self-help and self-reliance are the keys to black social uplift (Orey, 2004; Watson, 1998). Finally, contemporary Black Feminism has its roots in the unique experiences of black women and their interpretations of the simultaneous racial and gender discrimination they encounter in American society (Collins, 1989; Collins; 1996). As a theory, Black Feminism is used to explain the
intersections of sexism, racism and classism within American social institutions (Collins, 1989).

These divergent political theories do not imply that there is not a sense of collectivity within the African-American community. The homogeneity in presidential candidate choice is a reflection of this collectivity. Instead, these theories imply that there are differences in how individual African-Americans develop political thoughts and attitudes while maintaining a sense of connection to African-Americans as a collective group with common sociopolitical interests. The current study seeks insight into these collective group interests and how these are related to partisan loyalty.

While studies have documented the overwhelming support of Democratic presidential candidates by African-Americans (Olsen and Green, 2006; Kidd, Diggs, Farooq and Murray, 2007), there have not been studies demonstrating why African-Americans as individuals prefer Democrats over candidates from other political parties, and this study will begin to fill in this gap. Wallace, et. al. (2008) provide insight into the attitudes that African-Americans share with Democrats and Republicans. They discover that African-Americans political attitudes can be described as “anti-war, evangelical, with a strong concern about civil rights” with a heavy amount of skepticism of “trendy political ideas and environmental concerns” (pp. 145). Also, Kidd, et. al. (2007) suggest that the Democratic Party is perceived to be more progressive on subjects like social welfare, civil rights, and other ideas that are perceived to be more important to African-Americans. The authors also state that while “black conservativism” (pp. 165) is a real, measurable concept with the potential to influence voting behavior, broad African-
American identification with Democrats tends to play a larger role in voting decisions. Wallace, et. al. (2008) support this assertion, with African-Americans showing more favorable views on civil rights issues and socially funded programs and more negative attitudes toward the war on terror. This study also notes that these are the only issues in which the subjects had substantial differences with other ethnicities, suggesting that these issues must go a long way in African-American support of the Democratic Party. This literature suggests that African-American voters tend to see the Democratic Party and the issue stances associated with it as the most powerful cue in their Election Day behavior. Moreover, research by Avery (2007) suggests that African-Americans have a deep distrust in political systems after the Supreme Court’s ruling favoring former Republican President George W. Bush in the now infamous *Bush v. Gore* (2000) case, a decision which led to the former being elected president in 2000 after a vote recount in the state of Florida. This decision was controversial, as Bush won this election despite not winning the popular vote. Avery’s (2007) demonstrates that African-Americans in particular became distrustful of American political systems in general, and George W. Bush in particular.

*The 2008 Election and the Rise of Barack Obama*

While Bush saw unprecedented approval ratings from the public after the events of 9/11, he also saw the longest period of low and declining ratings on historical record (Jacobson, 2009). The initially supported but later unpopular Iraq War and a declining economy are the main reasons for this historically high disapproval (Fox, 2009). Fox’s study found that the war in Iraq affected the opinions of Democrats more than opinions
about the economy, while Republican opinions were more affected by the economy. Bush’s widespread disapproval also led to more widespread disdain for the Republican Party (Jacobson, 2009). This dissatisfaction with Bush and the Republicans set the foundation for Barack Obama’s historical election.

Staples (2010) states that in U.S. elections, economics, race, values, religion and patriotism all play a role in the decisions of voters, and this was especially evident during the 2008 campaign. As the economy declined and an unpopular war continued, race became an issue as Obama was the first non-white person to secure the nomination of a major American political party. Religion became an issue as many Obama opposers implied that he was a covert Muslim. As is custom in most presidential election, the values and patriotism of all the candidates, including Obama, came into question. Race, religion, values and patriotism all came to the forefront on the road to the 2008 General Election, providing one of the more unique presidential elections in American history.

Because of the lack of precedent when it comes to African-American candidates, race and racial prejudice became a widely discussed aspect of the 2008 election. Greenwald, et. al, (2009) found that “implicit,” or sub-conscious, preference for white people in subjects generally predicted a vote for Republican candidate John McCain. Payne, et. al., (2010) support this assertion, and also found that implicit racial prejudice increased the likelihood of a person voting against Obama. This study also showed that those with explicit racial prejudice were more likely to vote for McCain and less likely to vote for Obama. Racial bias has also been demonstrated as one of the reasons many have opposed now-President Obama and his policies (Knowles, Lowery and Schaumberg,
2010), and some argue that race-based tactics have been used by conservatives and Republicans to attack Obama. Reporting a survey of 1,042, Dwyer, Stevens, Sullivan and Allen (2009) argue that racism played a significant role in how Obama’s candidacy was evaluated, while sexism played less of a role in how Sarah Palin’s candidacy for the vice presidency was viewed.

In contrast to these findings, studies have also shown a strong preference for Obama in 2008 among African-Americans (Zhong, Galinsky and Unzueta, 2008; Todd and Gawiser, 2009). The Obama campaign increased voter turnout and ultimately benefitted from this turnout among the general voting populations and African-American voters (Osborn, McClurg, and Knoll, 2010; Todd and Gawiser, 2009). The idea of “change” pervaded his campaign, a slogan that was reflective of the real changes that occurred in electoral demographics and voter turnout during the 2008 campaign (Alex-Assensoh, 2008).

The purpose of the current study is to understand why so many African-Americans preferred Obama in this election and to make connections between Obama as a candidate and the more general themes that affect voter behavior in any election, such as issues stances and party perceptions. This review of the literature explored three different aspects of voting behavior. The first explored how voters in general make decisions, and it was discovered that a multitude of factors can come into play. For some voters, a single issue will decide their vote. For others, a rational process analyzing how candidates will benefit them financially determines who votes for whom. At the same time, some literature suggests that this rationale can be inhibited by cognitive
interferences such as habit, emotion, or the human inability to process every piece of information objectively. Other studies suggest that broad sociodemographic categories, and the social perceptions and attitudes forged within those categories can have an impact on political and voting behavior.

The current study views these theories as potential factors that can explain how people approach political topics and issues. This study intends to determine whether or not African-Americans vote in ways distinguishable from Americans in general. The historical election of Barack Obama and the overwhelming support for the Obama campaign by African-Americans provides an important opportunity to explore not only how African-Americans view the American political machine but how Barack Obama has influenced their perceptions of the political landscape. In the next section, I will expand on how this study explores these perceptions and attitudes.
Chapter 3: Methods

In this section, several topics will be explored. First, the sampling methods are described, discussing why these particular subjects were chosen and recruited. The actual sample characteristics, or what types of subjects were actually interviewed, are briefly described as well. Next, the interview process and questions are discussed, including the types of questions that were asked and the rationale behind these questions. This chapter ends with a description of how the data was analyzed and how the findings of this study have been explained.

Sampling Methods

Twelve African-American voters were recruited for this study. All subjects met three criteria to be included: (1) they were all self-identified African-Americans, (2) at least 18 years old, and (3) had voted in the 2008 presidential election. “African-Americans” were chosen to describe the people in this study to distinguish them from other groups of black Americans such as black Hispanics or first generation African immigrants. This choice stems from the assumption on my part that Americans of African descent tend to have a very specific set of historical and cultural patterns that influence political thought and behavior, while those who immigrated recently might be more influenced by their cultures of origin. This may not be true across the board with either group, but the inclusion of recently immigrated Africans would obscure important distinctions between each group. For that reason, I determined that the political thought and behavior of black immigrants was beyond the scope of this study.
The participants were recruited through a combination of convenience and “snowball” sampling in a small, Midwestern university town. The sample began with the researcher contacting several members of the university concerning participation in this study. From there, potential participants were referred to me by previous participants in the study. These prospective participants were contacted through e-mail or phone. With permission, fliers (see Appendix A) were posted in various locations around the research site to recruit additional volunteers for this project. As the study progressed, most of the responses were from university students and affiliates. Community members not affiliated with the university were initially sought out, and four potential subjects responded to emails and fliers. However, as the study progressed, university members responded more rapidly and in greater numbers than community members. When this was discovered, it was decided that only university members would be used as participants. As a result, all subjects are associated with the university in some capacity or another. I have kept their specific affiliations confidential to protect their identities.

*Interview Process and Questions*

One-on-one interviews were chosen to obtain a personal, in-depth insight as to why African-Americans vote as they do. While quantitative data are essential to understanding voting behavior, it is also essential that more individualized accounts of motives and behaviors be available as well. Quantitative studies and polls of voting behavior generally show how African-Americans vote as a group. This is a vital part of the exploration of this topic, and studies such as these have provided the foundations here. What this particular study will do is show how African-Americans perceive the
American political landscape and how these perceptions are manifested in voting behavior. This approach provides in-depth exploration of how individuals function within the American political landscape as African-Americans.

All interviews were conducted in places where the subjects felt comfortable. Participants were informed before the interview began that they were allowed to choose a location such as their own offices or personal spaces. Before the interview began, the participants gave verbal consent, though a statement of my intentions for the interview were available upon request (see Appendix C). The participants were informed that all the information they shared would be confidential and that their private information would be protected and that pseudonyms would be provided for the subjects for maximum protection of their identity. They were told that they could refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. Each interview was audio taped, and most of them lasted between forty and fifty minutes. After the interview was completed, each subject was thanked for their participation.

In the first part of the interview, I collected basic demographic information from the subjects. This included their gender, age, education level, marital status, political party identification and home state. After demographic information was obtained, I asked a set of open-ended questions. These questions (see Appendix B) were derived, in part, from Teixeira (2008) and Lewis-Beck, et. al. (2008). While I did not copy questions verbatim from these authors, the questions I used for my interviews were developed with the work of these authors in mind. Though a few interviews took under forty minutes and some well over an hour, most of the interviews lasted between forty and fifty minutes.
All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. These audio files were destroyed after transcription, but the transcripts will be kept indefinitely. These transcriptions were labeled by the pseudonym given to each person to ensure confidentiality of information. As is the case with any qualitative research, the questions asked served as guidelines for the interview, and all sessions were subject to additional questions and comments. Question sequences were adjusted depending on the flow of each individual interview. The specific questions presented in this study were structured around two more general research questions: (1) Why do so many African-Americans support the Democratic Party? (2) Why did so many African-American vote for Barack Obama? The order of questions was loosely tied to the same “funnel of causality” framework used by Lewis-Beck, et.al. (2008). Just as the authors here progressed from sociodemographic characteristics, party identification, candidate and issue attitudes to voter choice, this study progressed from a broad, loosely defined sociodemographic characteristic (“African-American) to the more specific behavior and perceptions stemming from the 2008 General Elections.

The first series of questions posed during interviews asked how the subjects felt about “the current state of American politics.” These inquiries were presented to determine the subjects’ general political orientations. This included how they felt about American politics as a whole, their party affiliation, their views of the Democratic and Republican parties, and their opinions of the former President George W. Bush. Special attention was also given to the influential political issues of the 2008 Election. These issues included economy/jobs, war and peace, health care, environment, moral issues
(such as religion, abortion, gay marriage or stem cell research), family related issues, education, and/or an “other” category.

The next set of questions focused on race and party affiliation. The subjects were asked how they felt about race relations and how this relates to the current political landscape, and how race relates to African-American support of the Democratic Party. The interviewees were also asked why African-Americans voted for Republicans in such small numbers. These questions were presented to the subjects as a result of the literature and statistical data suggesting overwhelming support for the Democrats by African-Americans and the nomination/election of the first African-American President in United States history.

The final set of questions focused specifically on how the subjects perceived Barack Obama’s candidacy and election. These questions were presented to measure how Barack Obama influenced their voting decisions without assuming they did vote for him. These questions were related to the previous items about the subjects’ perceptions of the political parties, the incumbent president, and the issues that guided their choice in 2008. The assumption here was that subjects’ views on the political parties and issues would influence how Obama’s candidacy affected their vote choice. Questions about the symbolism of his election were also presented to determine what Obama represented to them as the first African-American President.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, a thematic analysis of the interview transcriptions was conducted to find patterns in the statements made by the
subjects. Each interview was divided according to the questions from the interview outline. The answers provided by the participants were then analyzed question-by-question to find recurrent themes. The data was analyzed for themes that fell into two criteria outlined by Owen (1984): recurrence and repetition. Recurrence is when multiple parts of the data “had the same thread of meaning, even though different wording indicated such a meaning” (pp. 275).

The repetition criterion is an extension of the recurrence criterion. Repetitive themes were noted when “key words, phrases or sentences” were repeated throughout the interviews (pp. 275). This criterion serves as an extension of recurrence in that references more explicitly stated themes instead of implied ones. After themes were developed in the data, these themes were related to the overall voting patterns of the sample in the 2008 presidential election. The literature on voting notes sociodemographic variables, party identification, issues, and/or candidates as factors that directly affect how people come to their final voting decisions (e.g., Lewis-Beck, et. al., 2008; Teixeira, 2008; Law and Redlawsk, 2006). Thus, the contextual factors related to the subjects’ perceptions of race relations, Democrats and Republicans, evaluations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, and political issue stances were all used to help explain the actions the participants took in 2008. I will analyze the data for recurring and repetitive themes within these factors, and how these findings could relate to some of the theories mentioned in chapter two. The next chapters will discuss the findings in relation to these contextual factors and how these factors led the subjects to vote as they did, and how the
findings of this study reflect the findings of the previous literature on African-American political attitudes and voting behavior.
Chapter 4: Findings

This section discusses the sample characteristics of this study, the general perceptions the respondents expressed during the interviews, and four major themes that emerged from the data. The first section will briefly discuss the gender, age, education level, marital status and homestate of the respondents. The remainder of this chapter is divided into four sections that directly address the four major themes. The first theme discusses the attitudes expressed concerning the Democratic and Republican Parties, and how the former party was generally viewed more favorably than the latter. The next theme discusses the economy and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as the main political issues that guided the respondents’ votes in 2008. The third theme discusses the ideas held by the participants about former president George W. Bush. The final theme of this study describes the interviewees’ perceptions of Barack Obama and why he was so appealing to African-Americans as a presidential candidate.

Sample Characteristics

The respondents’ ages ranged from 20 to 51 years old, with eight of the respondents in their 20’s, three in their 40’s and 1 in his/her 50’s. Five respondents were female, and seven were male. Eight of the respondents were self-proclaimed Democrats and the other four were self-identified independents. Seven were students, and five were universities employees. Four of the respondents had a master’s degree or beyond, seven were currently in college and one, while affiliated with the university, had a high school diploma and vocational training. Only two of the respondents were married, and only four of the respondents were from states outside of Ohio.
Democrats vs. Republicans

The first theme to arise from the data was the distinctions made between Democrats and Republicans. Eight out of 12 of the participants in this study identified as Democrats, while the remaining 4 identified themselves as moderate or independent. None of them chose Republican nominee John McCain in 2008, and all 12 respondents chose Democrat Barack Obama. Studies and exit polls (i.e., CNN.com, 2008; Teixiera, 2008) have shown that the vast majority of those who identify as Republican or Democrat vote in accordance with their party affiliation in presidential elections.

Some participants expressed views of Republicans as being wealthy, fiscally conservative, and heavily invested in personal financial success. Ali, a student at the university, was less adamantly against the Republican Party than some others, but did express a similar perception of this party as representative of the wealthy elite: “[People] who have a lot of money, I assume are automatically Republican ‘cause they’re interested in keeping their money.” Irene, a student, used words like “corporate” to describe Republicans, and believed them to be more focused “on financial wealth and success.” Stuart described them as out of touch with “the concerns of everyday working people and even middle class…taxpayers.” Colin, who established early in the interview session that he had “no interest” in Republican politics, cited wealth-related elitism as one of the reasons he disliked the Republican Party.

“[T]hey're the party that represents the interests of the wealthy, the elite in this country. They will always rhetorically say they're, they're protecting
small business owners and all that, but basically they're doing the bidding of the wealthy elite. The association of Republicans with being wealthy and fiscally conservative seems to drive many of the opinions the subjects have of this party. In addition to the war in Iraq, which is discussed below, the subjects mentioned economics frequently when discussing the issues that most affected their voting choice in the 2008 election.

With these generally negative views being expressed, one would expect the participants’ views of the Democratic Party would be positive. And compared to their views of Republicans, this is true. After all, each respondent in this study voted for Barack Obama, suggesting that the respondents hold at least somewhat favorable views of the Democratic Party. One frequently associated idea was progressivism or liberalism, in contrast to the description of Republicans as conservative. Ali said “I think Republicans are more…accepting of the policy that's already in place. Whereas Democrats more are like, they just push for, I guess, a more progressive or change in policy.” Colin took this sentiment a step further, associating the party with both the working class and some progressive historical movements:

“The Democrats had pretty much become the home of the working class and majority of the population. And so in that respect, you know, you have your New Deal coalitions, you have sort of the culmination of the 60's with the, you know, the Civil Rights movement, the Women's movement, the labor movement, things that come together.”
Because the respondents are all either self-identified Democrats or Independents who voted Democrat in 2008, it is reasonable to assume that this identification of the Democratic Party with lower and middle classes and “diverse” groups of people is a positive trait in the eyes of the respondents. Combine this with the respondents’ generally negative views of the Republicans and their associations with the rich, wealthy and/or privileged, and it should be no surprise that all of the respondents preferred the Democratic nominee in the 2008 election.

When the respondents were asked about this loyalty, a sub-theme emerged during the interviews: the history of African-Americans in relation to the two parties. The respondents felt that African-American loyalty to the Democratic Party was mostly rooted in the history between these two groups. The 1950/60’s were often mentioned as the main foundational period for this loyalty, as this era was crucial period of the Civil Rights Movement. Ali had this to say about the legacy of Democrats and Republicans:

“…I wanna say, before Kennedy, around there, uhh, blacks kinda preferred Republicans…I just think the Democrats, maybe since the Kennedy, uhh, or Johnson Administration have kinda had this push, or have kinda put race relations…and just civil rights in general at the forefront…[It]seems like black people are more loyal to the Democratic Party because the Democratic Party is more loyal to black people. You know, it’s kinda like this reciprocal relationship we have. Whereas the Republicans…you might get a candidate here or there who says, you know, ‘I'm interested in Civil Rights,’ but as a party in general, I don't think that's one of their main concerns.”
In addition, Bo noted the specific policies from that time that may have shaped the legacy of Democrats in the minds of African-Americans:

“[T]he Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and by umm, Johnson, the Great Society programs, Johnson, umm, up to the stuff with Clinton. And so, there's been a belief that Democrats, there's been historical belief from a presidential perspective, that Democrats have been more supportive of issues for, for blacks. And I think we've paid homage to that by voting for them in a bloc, as massive bloc.”

Despite this seemingly positive relationship, the respondents’ views of the Democrats were not totally positive. Colin, who associates Democrats with being more representative of the general population, was still critical of this party:

“…the Democrats haven't been, you know, sort of really coming out. And they've been running scared. And that's sort of the legacy of the Reagan years. The political discourse has just shifted so far to the right. There really is no room for discussion on the left to talk about, you know, God forbid we be called ‘liberals.’ I mean, you look at [the health care bill], and they're saying ‘It's socialism.’”

Bo also stated that, while he was a self-identified Democrat, that his party had some flaws:

“[I]n many instances, I think, I wish the Democrats would develop a little more backbone about certain things. I think they, umm, they allow, in many instances, their political agenda to be dictated to them rather than them
dictating it. I think they also, umm, are often too busy in trying to satisfy everyone. And you have realize that you have to satisfy the majority. And, umm, as long as you can do that, you can advance an agenda. But I think, just in general, that they should get a little more backbone and more toughness.”

These findings suggest that voting for Democratic candidates does not necessarily imply that the respondents find no fault with the Democratic Party. Rather, it would appear that the perceived flaws of the Democratic Party are fewer or less important than the perceived flaws associated with the Republican Party. The data found here suggests that issues seem to be more important than partisanship. In addition to these viewpoints, the respondents often made reference to the historical legacy of Democrats when it comes to the overwhelming support Democrats receive from African-Americans as a whole. It seems that, given the two-party system, it should be no surprise that the respondents prefer Democrats so strongly. Even though they do not feel the Democrats are perfect, it would seem that, given the limited options presented to them, Democrats are the better choice. Of the available options, Democrats seem to address the political issues that are the most important to the respondents.

Political Issue Stances

The second major theme of the data emerged from the political issues that were important to the respondents. To be sure, there was some variation in the issues that the respondents felt were important. But throughout the interviews, the most widely accepted issues of importance during the 2008 election were the economy and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Since the respondents generally rejected the fiscal conservatism
associated with being Republican and an economic recession took place under the administration of an unpopular Republican president, it should be no surprise that seven of the 12 subjects felt the economy was an important issue. Stuart expressed concern for the economy in relation to jobs when he said “[T]he state of the economy is a big [issue]. You know, are people employed?” Marie’s comments nicely summarize the comments on the economy. She posed these questions while evaluating candidates in 2008:

“How you're looking after, sort of, ordinary people, you know? The poor and the working class, you know? The ways in which you…are you looking to sort of empower them? Give them the tools which they can sort of lead their lives and strive, grow, and do what they need to do? Or are you going to make it harder and harder and harder for them to hold on to their homes and, and their private property and to send their children to college?”

While many of the subjects cited the war in passing, they were much more elaborate in explaining their issues with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bonita believed that the U.S. “pretty much invaded [Iraq and Afghanistan] under false pretenses” and Ali seconded this viewpoint:

“I don't understand why we're over there, really. I don't-well, I feel like the initial…reason we went over there was a reaction to 9/11. You know what I mean? Despite what they may say. And then it changed from this search for Osama bin Laden in, umm, Iraq, then it was like Sadaam Husseien and Saudi Arabia. Now, it's like, Pakistan, it's just-and Afghanistan. It's just all over the place. And I, it's like no one can really say what the point is. Uhh, you know,
we trying to bring Democracy over there. We talked about, umm, you know, the, the, I guess, the mistreatment of the women over there… is why we went over there initially still the reason we're still there today? And if it's not, then why haven’t we brought people home?"

Many of the respondents felt that the U.S. had been misled into these wars, and expressed confusion over the reasons for invading these countries. The views of the respondents on this war have a direct relationship to the generally negative views the respondents have about politics in general. The respondents’ views on the war are examples of how they generally do not trust the American political system in general as well as their skepticism of George W. Bush and a war that is directly linked to him. Irene opposed the war and linked this directly to President Bush:

“I think [an important issue] was very much so the War in Iraq, what was goin’ on with that, the proposed ways to deal with it. And I think that at that point we were very much a divided country and there was just a lot of, I don't wanna say, like, hate, but there was just this built up mistrust with our government. Because, like I said, I felt like Bush…was serving his own interests and not the interests of the population.”

In addition to the general disdain for this war, many respondents noted the economic effects of the war as well. Marie noted the link between the Iraq War and economics, or more specifically, economic status:

“…I think we're, we're poaching our military personnel. We're poaching their lives, we're poaching their future. You've, you've broken up families.
And it, you know, you have laid an economic burden on the military personnel, and this is a voluntary military. There's no draft. It's a very different situation, instead of the draft. And that would make it a very different war. Like if everybody went in the lottery, you know? We find a way to end this war really, really fast. But because it's a voluntary military, which is by and large coming from people who are poor, working class. Or put it another way, it's not automatic that they're going to college. That they're going to have to finance their own college and they may not wanna take on, you know, $30,000 to $40,000 in debt. So this, this, these are the people that are being poached. That, that's what is going on now. Because, in addition to how they, what shape they come back to, in, umm, they're the ones that are paying the price.”

As far as political issues, the war and the economy seem to be driving forces behind the negative perceptions of American politics. As we shall come to see, political issues and ideas were often associated with the incumbent President at the time, George W. Bush. These issues, and candidates and political figures' stances on these topics, often determined the evaluation of politicians in office and those running for office.

*Perceptions of George W. Bush*

The third major theme of the data comes from the respondents’ negative criticism of Bush was his economic and foreign policy and the attitudes they felt influenced his policies. Bo was slightly less negative when describing what he thought of the Bush presidency, but remained critical of his term:
“[H]e seems like he was a decent enough guy that got in way over his head. I don't think he's the brightest person in the world and I think that's a pretty well accepted perception of him. But, I-I think, once again, he exemplified that Republican trait that I talked about of digging your foot in the sand and not movin'. And even though it became clear that our course of action in Iraq and the Middle East was not the best course of action. He stuck to his guns and wouldn't back down. But I think some of his economic policies have just gotten us into trouble...So, I just think he was someone who was not...ready for the challenges that he faced. I don't think he had the, the capacity in a number of different ways to deal with the challenges that he faced.”

Bo’s statement exemplifies a theme within the subjects’ perception of Bush that cited his “stubborn” attitude as a problem. Marie elaborated further on this point, and how she felt it may manifest itself in policy decisions made by the former President:

“[H]e's a very inflexible, um, character. And what I mean by that is that if you have a leader that says ‘I’m gonna make a decisions and this is what we're going to do,’ that can be a tremendous strength. You know, a lack of waffling in certain situations. But I think he has, there's an inflexibility in character that he fundamentally is not curious about alternatives. You know, it's just like it doesn’t even occur to him to consider how this, this, umm, how a different set of ideas or policies that could go a couple of different ways.”
Combine his association with the Republican Party with his support of an unpopular war and a strong distaste for his attitude and character, and the respondents viewed him in an overwhelmingly unfavorable way. In contrast to the respondents’ views of President Bush, they viewed Barack Obama much more favorably

*Perceptions of Barack Obama as a Black President*

The final theme to arise from the data emerged from the respondents’ perceptions of Barack Obama. As a Democrat with no real associations with President Bush, this alone could go a long way in pushing the respondents to voting for Obama in 2008. African-Americans tend to support Democrats in Presidential elections in high numbers (Bositis, 2005). In addition, when asked what dislikes they had about Obama’s candidacy, very few expressed any negative viewpoints. A sub-theme that surfaced through the data was the respondents’ views of Obama as a symbol or “progress.” All of the participants believed that Obama was a representation of both political and racial progress. For instance, Irene expressed a sense of amazement in the fact that we have elected a black man as President:

“...I think that it's so amazing that black, that black people have a, umm, someone to look up to. Especially the children. I think that Obama becoming President was so big for black children. And I think that that is amazing to instill that sense of hope and pride in them and letting them know that they can be whoever they wanna be. And also letting, I guess, a larger American population know that... a leader could be found in the
most unlikely places. Who woulda thought that a black person would be president?"

While many expressed happiness and other positive emotions in relation to Obama’s election, the subjects were not overly optimistic about the impacts Obama would have on race relations in the country. This idea was most noted in the subjects’ rejection of a “post-racial” society where race was no longer an impediment to success in American society. Marie’s comments summed up the perspective that most of the subjects had about race relations, American politics, and how these things have been affected by Barack Obama:

“[D]uring the presidential election, you know, one of the things, the ideas that was promoted were that we were in or we were approaching a post-racial society. I have no idea what that means. I really don't...You know, I think it's this sort of thing, ‘Oh, we're fine. We're good.’ You know? ‘We got a black president. We're good.’ You know? (laughs)... if [Obama’s election] only becomes a symbol, and not a moment in time when things could have gotten a lot better for a lot of people then it's gonna become a very, it'll be a nice memory. But if it doesn't become truly a sort of Reconstruction in which we address, umm, race, class and gender in inequality in a very fundamental way that empowers people rather than pits them between ‘Either have the government do it for you or do without.’ Umm, it, it's just going to be just a very pleasant memory. It'll be another 50 to 100 years before an African-American woman is elected or
the 2nd African American man is elected. You know? And he won't get a 2nd term.”

The idea of change or progress was also a recurring idea. Seven of the respondents felt that Obama represented a progress in race relations. Six of the respondents directly stated that Obama represented more than just progress in race relations. Obama’s election was seen as a milestone in race relations, he represented more than just a black president. They felt he would be a good president. Irene summarizes this notion:

“And I think that it also opened, uhh, it put us in a position where we can have better relations with the rest of the world… I liked the fact that, uhh, that he was really down to Earth. He dealt with so much heat during that period and he just add, he addressed it directly. We got answers from him. Do you know how wonderful it is to get answers from someone comin' from Bush who could talk his self around anything and did not answer any questions that were given to him? So like, I liked that fact that there's just this air of like honesty and truth about him that I really liked.”

Bo’s comments further support this notion:

“…a lot of people think that the overwhelming black turnout for Obama was because, solely because he was black. I don't think it was solely because he was black. It's because he was a combination of a black man who had his head together and had a great vision for the country. If he didn't have that vision, I don't think he would have gotten as many black votes as he got.”
Overall, Obama represented, in limited forms, progress in American race relations. They did not feel that Obama represented a post-racial society, but they did feel that he would have a positive effect on race relations in the U.S.

Conclusion

These findings clearly demonstrate that the respondents of this study have a strong inclination toward voting Democrat, even if they do not directly identify as Democrats. Most felt that, historically speaking, the Democratic Party had been more receptive to issues that were significant to African-Americans. These data suggest that two of the most important issues during the 2008 election were the wars and economics. When war was referenced, it was often framed as a contemporary issue. The respondents did not state that they were philosophically opposed to all war, but that they were opposed specifically to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. When it came to the economy, there was a more fundamental philosophical disagreement with the Republican Party. The respondents often thought of Republicans as conservative when it came to economic issues. Since few of them had ever voted for this party, it would appear that the subjects take issue with this economic philosophy.

The respondents also saw George W. Bush as an ineffective president, and cited his handling of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as a large source of dissatisfaction with his performance during his time in office. Conversely, the respondents generally viewed Barack Obama much more favorably than Bush. He did not have ties to the unpopular George W. Bush or the Republican Party. And while it was not the sole reason they voted for him, his being African-American was appealing to the respondents in that it
represented progress in American race relations, but not a “post-racial” society. Now that
the themes have been established, the next section discusses possible interpretations of
these findings, and how they relate to the previously discussed literature. This section
discusses the answers provided to the general research questions of this study. More
specifically, it discusses how the historical legacy of Democrats and Republicans, the
political issues of the 2008 election, and Barack Obama’s candidacy contributed to (1)
the continuation of African-Americans voting for Democratic Presidential candidates and
(2) historically high voting percentages for Obama among African-Americans.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This portion of the study explains the findings and ties them to the research on voting/political behavior in the African-American community. This section is divided into four parts. The first section discusses African-American loyalty to the Democratic Party, and gives explanations as to why this loyalty exists through the data obtained in this study. This section ties the explanations given by the respondents to the broader trends in African-American voting behavior. The second section addresses the effect Barack Obama had on voting decisions, and gives explanations as to why he managed to gain more of the African-American vote than usual. The third section discusses the limitations of this study, and the fourth discusses possible paths that can be taken in the future to build on the findings of the current research.

African-Americans and the Democratic Party

Overall, the findings suggest that African-American support of the Democratic Party is rooted mostly in a personal identification with this party, the historical legacies of the Democrats and their general party platforms on pivotal political issues. It must be noted that the respondents were mostly Democrats, were generally opposed to the Republican Party, and viewed George W. Bush’s two terms in office negatively. Each factor would make a voter more likely to cast a vote for a Democratic candidate, and this was the case as all twelve of the subjects studied here voting for Barack Obama. It also appears that there is some form of rational economic voting for these respondents. The specifics of the economy as a political issue were not discussed at length during this study, but the fact that it was often mentioned by the respondents suggests that their
evaluations of the Republican economic philosophy played a role in how they vote. These findings suggest that issues like the economy and the war deserve more specific attention, as they can be framed as “single-issues” (Fournier, et. al., 2003; Conover, et. al., 1982) that weigh heavily when African-Americans make voting decisions. The data presented in this study suggest that race and class inequality in economics are political issues that are important to African-Americans as a group, and that these issues have consequences at the polls for both political parties.

Though economics are not the only politically significant issues on the minds of voters, it is one of the more dominant issues that arise when party performance and candidates are evaluated. The 2008 election took place in the midst of a significant downturn in the American economy. It would appear that the perception of fiscal conservatism and wealthy “elitism” led the respondents to reject the party they believed to embody these ideas. These findings also indicate that the subjects use at least some rational economic theory as they evaluate political parties and the candidates they nominate for presidential elections (Kramer, 1971; Sears, Lau, Tyler & Allen, Jr., 1980; Ebeid and Rodden, 2006). Also, the recession took place under the watch of a Republican President and a predominantly Republican Congress until the 2006 interim elections. This is an important contextual factor in the overall voting trends of 2008, and the data in this study suggests a deeper fundamental incompatibility between African-Americans and Republicans. It should also be noted that while many of the subjects mentioned a distaste for Republican candidates in relations to economic policy, they did not mention any
specifics about Democratic policies. This aspect of African-Americans’ political views should be studied more in depth in the future.

These findings suggest that the respondents believe African-American support for the Democratic Party has its roots in the historical legacy of the parties. Many subjects noted that a change may have taken place around the Civil Rights era of the 1950’s and 1960’s. While a majority of African-Americans have voted for Democrats since around 1936 (Topping, 2008; Bositis, 2005), this pivotal period in history seems to be an important turning point. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society programs are two important pieces of legislation to consider. Both of these legislative measures were put into effect by Johnson, a Democrat. Many of the respondents cited Civil Rights as a turning point in African-American group voting choice. Even though more Republicans than Democrats voted in favor of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Democratic Presidents who helped support this act are important in molding the historical perceptions of the two parties. And while there have been Republicans who have attempted to help in the cause of Civil Rights for African-Americans, no Republican president has a landmark piece of legislation of that magnitude to point to when it comes to helping African-Americans. Many of the subjects noted this history during the interviews, implying that this was a pivotal period in American politics.

These findings would also suggest that the issues of importance within the sample lead the respondents to be more supportive of the Democratic Party, especially the perception of a long-standing philosophical divide in economics between historically
poor African-Americans and Republicans who are believed to be the party of the wealthy elite. Poorer groups of people tend to vote for Democrats in today’s political climate, presumably because Democrats are believed to more adequately address the needs of the poor (Todd and Gawiser, 2009; Teixeira, 2008), though some voters believe otherwise (Frank, 2004). While socioeconomic class was not accounted for in this study, the findings suggest that the respondents were more inclined to vote for Democrats, as they are believed to more adequately address the needs of the poorer and working classes. The Republican Party is viewed as lacking concern for the financial well-being of the less fortunate, while the Democrats are more associated with the needs of the poorer and working classes. This association has important ties to the greater literature on the subject of African-American political thought. It would appear that since many of the respondents’ targeted the Republican affiliations with the rich in their criticisms that the participants identify more with the less wealthy or poor. This notion is reflective of ideas discussed by Dawson (2001, 1994) that have demonstrated African-American politics to be associated with the less privileged because of the historical legacies of oppression that African-Americans have endured. As a group, African-Americans have been behind virtually every social indicator of status and privilege, including income, educational attainment and even life expectancy. This legacy has led to a deeper identification of African-Americans with oppressed people even when African-Americans themselves are privileged. Thus, they still fail to identify with the “elite.” And in this context, they see the “elite” as members of the Republican Party.
This legacy may lead African-Americans to identify more with issues, parties and candidates that align themselves with the poor and working classes of America, and less with those associated with the more fortunate. This attitude is a reflection of the historical disconnect between African-Americans and higher social classes. African-Americans have generally been poor throughout American history. Given this history, it would appear that African-Americans and their linkages to lower classes are viewed as incompatible with fiscal conservativism. The bond between their race and America’s underclass is a strong determinant in how African-Americans vote.

This study is reflective of broader voting trends in African-Americans in that it shows that regardless of education level, being African-American and the cultural, social and historical legacies that come with being a member of this category seems to have an important influence on voting behavior. Hence, regardless of gender, marital status and other sociodemographic variables, respondents in this study voted for Democratic candidates. This does not mean that African-Americans simply vote Democrat because they are African-American, or that some issues are not particularly important to African-Americans. Rather, it would appear that race within this community is a strong influence on how they behave politically and how political parties, issues and candidates are evaluated. The subjects frequently associated the Democratic Party with poor, working-class and regular Americans while the Republicans were representative of the wealthy elite.

War is another topic that had deep political significance in 2008, especially in its connection with the unpopular George W. Bush. This issue could be framed under the
single-issue voting theory (Fournier, et. al., 2003; Conover, et. al., 1982). Perhaps the
wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are symbolic in that they are directly tied to Bush. The
respondents mentioned war as an important topic, but not because they stated they were
fundamentally opposed to war. Most simply felt misled by Bush when led into this war,
leading them to oppose Bush and one of his most important political moves. This
opposition to the war could be symbolic of a more general distaste for Bush as a
President. Moreover, research suggests that Bush’s historically low approval ratings
were generally connected to his performance in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the
domestic economy (Fox, 2009). The former issues were generally seen as more important
in Bush’s evaluation with Democrats, while the economy had more to do with the
negative views Republicans had of the Bush presidency (Fox, 2009).

The current study is a reflection of the former trend, as many of the respondents
cited war as a point of contention with President Bush. The respondents often saw the
war as unjustified, and felt that strategy used during the invasion of Iraq was not
effective. The respondents also noted that the shifting rationale for the war, from the
attacks of 9/11 and finding Osama Bin Laden to finding weapons of mass destruction.
These changes in reasoning led to skepticism of the war at best, and outright
condemnation at worst. The respondents’ reactions to this issue seems to be reflective of
a broader trend of distrust of the government within the African-American community,
particularly a government run by an unpopular Republican president whom many believe
was questionably elected in 2000 (Avery, 2007).
Given these findings, it would appear that the respondents’ views were reflective of the broader literature suggesting that support for the Democratic Party within the African-American community is based on a combination of issue stances associated with the Democrats (Kidd, et. al., 2007; Wallace, et. al., 2009), their historical legacy concerning African-Americans, and the Republican Party’s perceived lack of support (Topping, 2008). Unless there is a fundamental shift in the way the parties operate similar to the shift seen between the Civil War and the Great Depression, this research suggests that these African-Americans will remain loyal to the Democrats as long as the parties maintain their current issue stances. If Republicans are interested in attracting these votes, they would be wise to repair the damage done by the Bush presidency, and must address the distrust of Bush and the Republicans that stems from the controversial 2000 (Avery, 2007) election recount and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

_African-Americans and Barack Obama_

Findings suggest that the economy and the wars, a distaste for George W. Bush and the Republican party, and more favorable view of Barack Obama and the Democrats were the driving forces behind the respondents’ votes. The support Obama received from the respondents of this study is, first and foremost, rooted in the history between Democrats and African-Americans. Given the perceptions that have been expressed by African-Americans in other research (Kidd, et. al., 2007; Wallace, et. al., 2009) and the current study, issue preferences and historical legacy make African-Americans more likely to support Democratic candidates. And since Obama was the first African-American to seriously contend for any presidential nomination and went on to win the
general election, it should come as no surprise that he took such a large share of the African-American vote. African-American support for the Democratic Party in general elections in recent history has usually hovered between 85% and 90%, but Obama was able to capture virtually the entire African-American voting population (Todd and Gawiser, 2009).

The data found in the current study suggest that Obama did not win the African-American vote solely because he was black or solely because he was Democrat. Instead, he won 90% or more of the African-American vote because of both factors. Being Democrat means having a direct connection to the legacy of Democrats as being in support of the African-American community. It also represented an association with people who fell outside of the wealthy and elite, which would include the majority of African-Americans. Though the respondents did not feel that the Democratic Party was without flaw, it does appear that the respondents’ views on important political issues are closer the general platforms of the Democrats than those of the Republican Party.

The election of Barack Obama represented a considerable amount of race-related progress in the minds of the respondents. Obama represented to the respondents significant changes that would not have been possible just a generation ago. The respondents often admitted that Obama’s race increased his appeal in their eyes, though it was not their sole reason for voting for him. He represented advancement that many of them said they thought they would never see in this lifetime, and was a source of hope and pride for African-Americans that would not have existed had another white male been elected president. Though the respondents did express pride in Obama’s historical
achievements, he did not represent a post-racial society, or one in which racial bias or racism is no longer a significant social force in the lives of African-Americans. The respondents were quick to note the many race-related problems that still exist in many different aspects of American society. This is an important balance, as it suggests that African-American voters in this study did not vote blindly based on race, but that they were capable of expressing joy in Obama’s election without becoming overly optimistic about what exact changes would take place. Moreover, it should be remembered when one suggests African-American vote solely on a racialized basis that Obama is not the first African-American to run for president, as Republican Alan Keyes and Democrats Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson and Carol Mosley-Braun have all run for president within the last three decades but never got the support from the Democratic Party or African-Americans that Obama received. After all, none of these candidates even won the primary elections. Obama’s appeal seems to stem from a combination of his African-American race, his ties to the Democrats and his being the first African-American to have a legitimate shot at winning the presidency.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study is its small sample size. Moreover, this study took place at one Midwestern university. It is entirely within the realm of possibilities that African-Americans from different geographic locations may have had different views on the election of Barack Obama. Also, all the respondents of this study were, in some way or another, affiliated with the university. This is also a potential influence on the views and opinions of the respondents, as they are more likely to be involved in classes
and activities than those with no formal education beyond a high school degree. On a more general note, 75% of non-white voters with college degrees chose Obama (Todd and Gawiser, 2009). The voting behaviors of the subjects in this study fit this trend, suggesting that there could be some sort of connection between being a person of color and a university affiliate that would make one more likely to vote for Obama in 2008.

As far as theoretical limits, this study could be affected by bounded rationality (Simon, 2000; Jones, 1999; Lau & Redlawsk, 2006; Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, et. al., 1991). This study did not study this theory specifically, but the research on this theory suggests that voters may not always be 100% aware of all of the influences on their vote choices.

**Future Research**

Though the sample of this study may be limited as far as what can actually be taken away from these findings, there are some important questions and ideas that have arisen as a result. As stated, there seemed to be something about being a non-white college student, graduate, or employee that made Barack Obama an appealing candidate. Investigation of this trend should take place in the future, and it would be wise to compare the voting rationale used by non-white college graduates to non-whites who do not have degrees. Education seems to be an important influence on voting behavior, and studies that explore why and how education affects the voting behavior of persons of color are in order.
As far as voting theories go, it seems that single-issue voting and rational-economic voting theories are in play when it comes to African-American voters. Studies could be conducted in the future that discuss how African-Americans view economics and wars as politically relevant issues, and how these issues affect political actions such as vote choice. However, when it comes to specific theories of African-American political thought, studies on these ideas should be conducted with these theories specifically in mind. This study was meant to get a more in-depth picture of African American voting behavior. The subjects generally expressed political perceptions not unlike those expressed by Americans in general. This implies that while one’s blackness may be a significant political factor, African-American political behavior is not solely “a black thing.” This overlap between the attitudes expressed here and those expressed by Americans in general would suggest that liberal integrationism was the most fitting political ideology for these respondents. However, future research of this topic should ask more specific questions about the African-American political theories mentioned by Dawson (2001) and Harris-Lacewell (2004), as opposed to the more general political questions asked in this study.

Each respondent also had some sort of complaint about the American political system. A future study could discuss why African-Americans are so distrustful of the government in general and of Republicans in particular. These ideas were touched on in the current study, but could be elaborated on further to determine whether or not this distrust has a more broad impact on how African-Americans vote. This distrust could also be an influence on why some African-Americans choose not to vote. It would also be
interesting to see if this distrust is racially-based, or a more basic fundamental
disagreement with how the American government is run.

Finally, it would also be useful to explore why some non-African-Americans
voted for Obama, and what he represented to them. Obama managed to take a large
portion of the Hispanic and Asian-American votes and a slight majority of white votes
(Todd and Gawiser, 2009). For the purposes of comparison, it would be interesting to
determine if there are any differences of opinion concerning Obama among racial groups.
For example, the respondents of this study generally did not believe Obama represented
the dawn of a post-racial society, or a society where racism or racial bias are no longer
significant social forces (Wise, 2009). It would be interesting to explore whether or not
other races were equally weary of this concept.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the responses provided by the
subjects were reflective of specific aspects of the literature on African-American voting
behavior. The voting behaviors of this group are rooted in both the general contemporary
themes of today’s political landscape (Dawson, 2001) and the more specific themes of the
African-American sociopolitical environment. The behaviors exhibited by the
respondents of this study during the 2008 Election suggest that their choices are reflective
of both political issues such as unpopular military ventures or concern for the economy
and Obama’s impact on race relations. The results of this study provide some interesting
insight as to why African-Americans vote as they do, and provide us with some
interesting questions as we move into future research.
References


Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Voting Behavior Study

Are you African-American?

Did you vote in the 2008 General Election?

Would you like to help researchers gain insight into African-American voting behavior?

If you answered “yes” to these questions, you are eligible to participate in this voting behavior study seeking to explain why African-Americans vote the way they do. Subjects will take part in a study that can help clear up misconceptions about how African-Americans vote.

If you are interested, please take a tab below. This study is being conducted here in Athens, Ohio through Ohio University’s Department of Sociology and Anthropology.
Appendix B: Interview questions

1) In general, how do you feel about the current state of American politics?

2) What is your political party identification?

3) What is your general perception of the Democratic Party?
   a. Republican Party?

4) What is your opinion of former president George W. Bush?

5) Have you voted before the 2008 general election? If so, who have you voted for?

6) Did any of the following campaign issues guide your choice in the 2008 general election? If yes, which ones, and why? If no, what did guide your choice?
   a. Economy and jobs?
   b. War & Peace?
   c. Health Care?
   d. Environment?
   e. Moral? (Religion, abortion, gay marriage, stem cell research, etc.)
   f. Family?
   g. Education?
   h. Other?

7) What are your feelings about race relations in America today?
8) Generally speaking, why do you think African-American voters strongly prefer the Democratic Party? Why do so few African-American voters prefer the Republican Party?

9) In the 2008 general election, did you think race was an issue? Explain.

10) Does your race/racial issues influence how you vote? If so, how?
    a. Did any racial issues influence your vote (affirmative action, etc.)?
    b. Is race a core part of your identity? If so, how might this affect your voting behavior?

11) Are other characteristics (gender, class, religion, etc.) of presidential candidates important to you? If so, why?
    a. Was Hilary Clinton appealing to you in the Primary Elections of 2008?

12) How did Barack Obama affect your voting decision, if at all?

13) What did you like about his primary/presidential candidacy?

14) What did you dislike about his primary/presidential candidacy?

15) What did his nomination/candidacy symbolize to you? To the country?

16) What did his election symbolize to you? To the country?

17) Was his election good for black/African-Americans? Explain?

18) Was his election good for America as a whole? Explain?

19) Would Barack Obama have been as appealing if he were a Republican or Third Party candidate?

Thank you for taking the time to do this interview. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the election, your voting choice, etc. that I may have missed?
Appendix C: Interview Consent Summary

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: African Americans, the Democratic Party and Barack Obama: A Qualitative Analysis

Researchers: David C. Springer

**Explanation of Study**

In this interview, you will be asked questions about your general voting behavior, with an emphasis on the 2008 Presidential Election. If you provide your signature on this form, you will be asked questions by the researcher. This interview will be audio taped. When these results of this interview and others are published by the researcher, your name will be changed to protect your identity and information that may identify you will be kept to a minimum, if it is used at all.

**Risks and Discomforts**

Subjects may feel uncomfortable answering certain questions, or may feel the need to leave the interview for some reason. They reserve these rights, and are not required to explain anything to the researcher.

Some subjects may also be apprehensive about expressing opinions that may be seen as unpopular. For this reason, I will replace the real names of the subjects with pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the subjects. Also the real names of the subjects will not appear in the notes or files of the researcher. When providing a signature, you may give yourself a pseudonym or simply sign as “X.”

**Benefits**

The benefits to the subjects will come from their participation in an important research project. They will have the opportunity to share their views and ideas on voting as individuals, and will provide information that may help clear up misconceptions about African-American voting behavior.

**Confidentiality and Records**

The materials related to this interview will be viewed primarily by the researcher. At times, assistance will be provided by a thesis advisor (whose contact information is provided below). However, the advisor is aware that all study-related information must
remain confidential. As stated before, pseudonyms will be used in place of the real names of the subjects to protect the identities of the interviewees.

**Compensation**
You will not be compensated in any way by Ohio University or the researcher.

**Contact Information**
Researcher: David C. Springer  
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E-Mail: ds288408@ohio.edu

Thesis Advisor: Debra Henderson, Ph. D.  
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E-Mail: henderd2@ohio.edu

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.